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ABSTRACT

This report discusses some undesirable impacts that segregated education may have on white children and reviews literature that discusses beneficial effects experienced by white children in integrated schools. The advantages gained by the white children of desegregated schools are discussed under the headings of academic achievement, interracial relations, quality of interaction, and intellectual horizons. The report concludes that ample evidence exists from research and classroom experiences that desegregation can be helpful to children of all races. (Author/JF)

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Nov. 1971

WHITE CHILDREN IN THE DESEGREGATION PROCESS

by Meyer Weinberg

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Intergroup Newsletter is happy to announce that it has again acquired the services of Meyer Weinberg as contributing editor for each of its five current year publications. Mr. Weinberg is editor and contributing author of *Integrated Education: Race and Schools,* and author of *Desegregation Research: An Appraisal; Race and Place;* and *Man and Society.* He has recently published a comprehensive bibliography, *The Education of the Minority Child.*

Segregated schools exact a high price from white children.

1. Under segregation, minority and majority schools are shortchanged. Quality education is usually measured by academic achievement. High achievement means higher than average achievement, and average acheivement must include the very low levels that are tallied in those segregated schools which can offer very limited educational opportunities. White parents have settled for much less than they realize by permitting educational deterioration at the low end of the scale. This produces a tendency for the entire school system to decline.

2. Under segregation, white children are usually subjected to an unrestrained racist education which breeds a false sense of superiority. Not only may they learn to think of minority children and people as less than human; it also becomes harder for them to learn their own potential and talent. Self-knowledge suffers.

3. Under segregation, white children are educated to live in a white world in which blacks, browns and other minorities are invisible. This fundamental distortion of reality ill-prepares children to understand the multi-racial character of American society. It penalizes white children by omitting vast areas of knowledge from their study and personal acquaintance.

Thus, white children have a large stake in desegregation. How, in fact, have they fared under segregation?

Academic Achievement

In desegregated schools, white children continue to learn at their accustomed rate. This has proved repeatedly to be the case. Here are a few typical examples.

After three years (1968-1971), white children in Evanston, Illinois schools maintained their achievement level.[1]

After two years (1967-1969), white children in Hartford, Connecticut, were found to be achieving at their usual rate.[2]

After three years of desegregation, covering 1966-1969, Riverside, California, school authorities found that white children's achievement did not sag.[3]

The exact technique of desegregation did not seem to affect learning. In Hartford, none of the white children was bused; in Riverside, very few were; in Evanston a fairly large number were.

Did white children learn at the expense of the black children?

Not at all. In fact, in some instances black children's achievement rate rose so rapidly that it exceeded that of white children. This was the case in Jackson, Michigan, as reported in a study by Katzenmeyer.[4] Another example was Samuels' study of New Albany, Indiana.[5] In almost all other cases, the achievement rate of black children rose, even if it did not equal or exceed that of white children. These are excellent instances of productive equality, of achievement at no expense to anyone else.

White parents might well ponder one implication of these studies; *Their children's earlier achievement was not the product of segregation.* Indeed, segregation was not even an advantage for achievement. The separation of white from black or other minority children was thus not an educational necessity but an incursion of political power in the classroom.

Children were being "used" for political purposes!

Interracial Relations

A desegregated school is one of the few places in American society where persons of varying ethnic groups can cooperate as equals in a benevolent setting. Does it work out this way in practice?

Porter found that in desegregated pre-schools in Boston, five-year old children already had racial conceptions and expressed racially-tinged emotions. Yet, actual play between black and white children went on apace. White boys developed a more positive attitude toward black children than did white girls. "In a quality interracial setting," writes Porter, "white children have an opportunity to have their stereotypes corrected by actual association with blacks. . . "[6]

Dorothy Singer studied black and white fifth graders in New York state. White children who had frequent contact with black children were more willing to associate with them. On the other hand, white children who had infrequent contact with black children "perceived the Negro in a distorted manner, giving him intellectual credit, but refusing to associate with him."[7] Kosler and associates found in a study of five schools that when classrooms reflected the racial composition of the schools as a whole that there were "positive relationships between school racial balance and the favorableness of interracial attitudes with any possible effects of socioeconomic status controlled."[8]

Marjorie McDonald, a psychoanalyst in a therapeutic nursery school and kindergarten in Cleveland, concluded after a searching study of the institution: "The racially integrated infant and

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pre-schooler gains a special advantage to his own identity formation. He gains a greater thoroughness of resolution of his ordinary developmental conflicts. He gains a greater ability to form and maintain object relationships, including those with members of other races."[9]

Two separate studies — one by Marascuilo and Levin, the other by Koslin and associates — found that children who entered into interracial friendships tended to regard their school in a more positive light.[10]

Quality of Interaction

There is no magic in desegregation itself. Simply having black and white children in the same school does not insure constructive cooperation between them. Porter emphasizes the need for "an active attempt to create an atmosphere of interracial tolerance, rather than simply desegregation or racial mixture alone."[11]

The penalty for schoolmen failing to create such an atmosphere can be very severe. Two separate studies, for example, have been made recently of disorders in urban high schools. Both studies agree that (1) the greatest disorders occurred at schools that recently became desegregated and (2) at nearly all these schools the authorities had not prepared staff, student body, and community for the impending changes.[12]

Intellectual Horizons

In a desegregated school, white children's intellectual horizons are widened. The openness of whites to such enlargement is usually underestimated.

Feagin analyzed responses of a national sample of whites during 1968. He found: "... A majority of white Americans, if a bare majority, see the contributions of Negroes to American history as important ... Also unexpected is the substantial support of these whites for school subjects which might stimulate Negro pride."[13] Caselli evaluated the responses of white seniors in a Santa Rosa, California, high school who had participated in a unit of black history study lasting six weeks. He found a high level of enthusiasm among the students. "Many students," he reported, "expressed a kind of angry amazement to learn that the educational establishment had not made them aware of these contributions [by blacks] at any time during their prior eleven-plus years of school."[14]

Conclusion

Evidence is ample, from research and daily classroom experience, that desegregation can be extraordinarily helpful to children of all races. There is no ground for believing that desegregation is designed to benefit black and Chicano but not white children.

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13. Joe R. Feagin, "Black History and White Americans," *Integrated Education,* 8 (November-December, 1970), 22-27.
14. Ron Caselli, "White Student Reaction to Black Studies," *Integrated Education,* 8 (September-October, 1970) 31-35.

MATERIALS REVIEWED AND RECOMMENDED

Curriculum Source Book for teaching Mexican-American studies in secondary grades: "A Study Guideline of the History and Culture of the Mexican-American", by Nicholas Rodillas and Morris Eaton, Title I Project Writers, Riverside Unified School District, Riverside, California.

Tape cassettes, audio only, summarizing recent court decisions dealing with desegregation: Juristics Cassette Tapes, 353 East 4th South Street, Salt Lake City, Utah 84111.

Sacramento study on integration giving evidence of academic improvement after desegregation: "An Evaluation Report on a Program of Compensatory Education, E.S.E.A., Title I, Focus on Reading and Mathematics", 1970-71, Sacramento City Unified School District, Sacramento, California.

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From the Editor:

The Intergroup Newsletter will be published every six weeks during the school year. Its purpose is to keep our readers informed in matters of school desegregation and integration. If something of general interest is happening in your school district we should like to hear about it so that the information can be passed along and perhaps used by other educators.

The services of the Western Regional School Desegregation Projects in planning, implementing and evaluating school desegregation are available to you on request.

Kathleen Siggers, Ed.D.
Associate Director
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